

Protomorph

Gameplay Vision & Player Experience Vision

Abrasive Games

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Game Team Overview

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Gameplay & Player Experience Vision

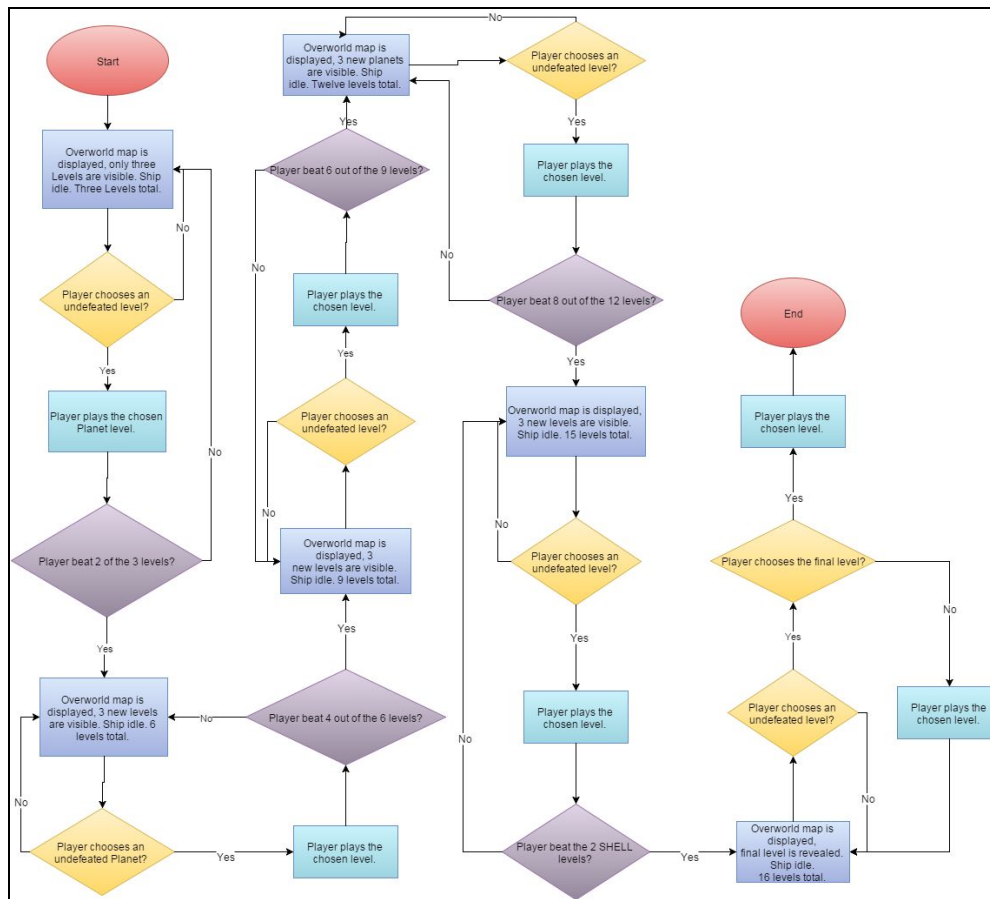
Gameplay Overview

Protomorph is a 2D sidescrolling action game where the player assumes control of Captain Fix, a spacer on an action-packed quest for revenge against the evil SHELL organization. Along his journey, Captain Fix finds mysterious technological artifacts that allow his personal spaceship to transform into a wide variety of different lethal forms. Use these forms and Captain Fix's lust for vengeance to explore the Kali Galaxy, all the while collecting more artifacts and defeating hostile space creatures. Discovering new powers along the way will be surprising and gratifying, leading to a great sense of anticipation at every turn.

Types of Fun

- Challenge
- Expression
- Sci-fi Fantasy
- Discovery
- Surprise
- Anticipation

Gameplay Flow



Gameplay Beats

- Beat 1: The Origin
- Beat 2: Beat-down
- Beat 3: Baby Steps...
- Beat 4: Pushing Forward
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 11. Draugen (Expert)
 12. Argus (Expert)
 13. Raijin (Master)
 14. SHELL Outpost (Master)
 15. SHELL Army Compound (Master)
 16. SHELL Mother Base (Final)

Types of Fun

Challenge

Enemies endanger you constantly, challenging your abilities and problem solving skills.

Expression

Create attack combinations to express yourself and to find your way to play the game.

Sci-fi Fantasy

Be immersed in a deep sci-fi setting with fantastical monsters and visually interesting locations.

Discovery

Explore vastly different planets in search of new sources of power. Discover new combinations of attacks to fight enemies.

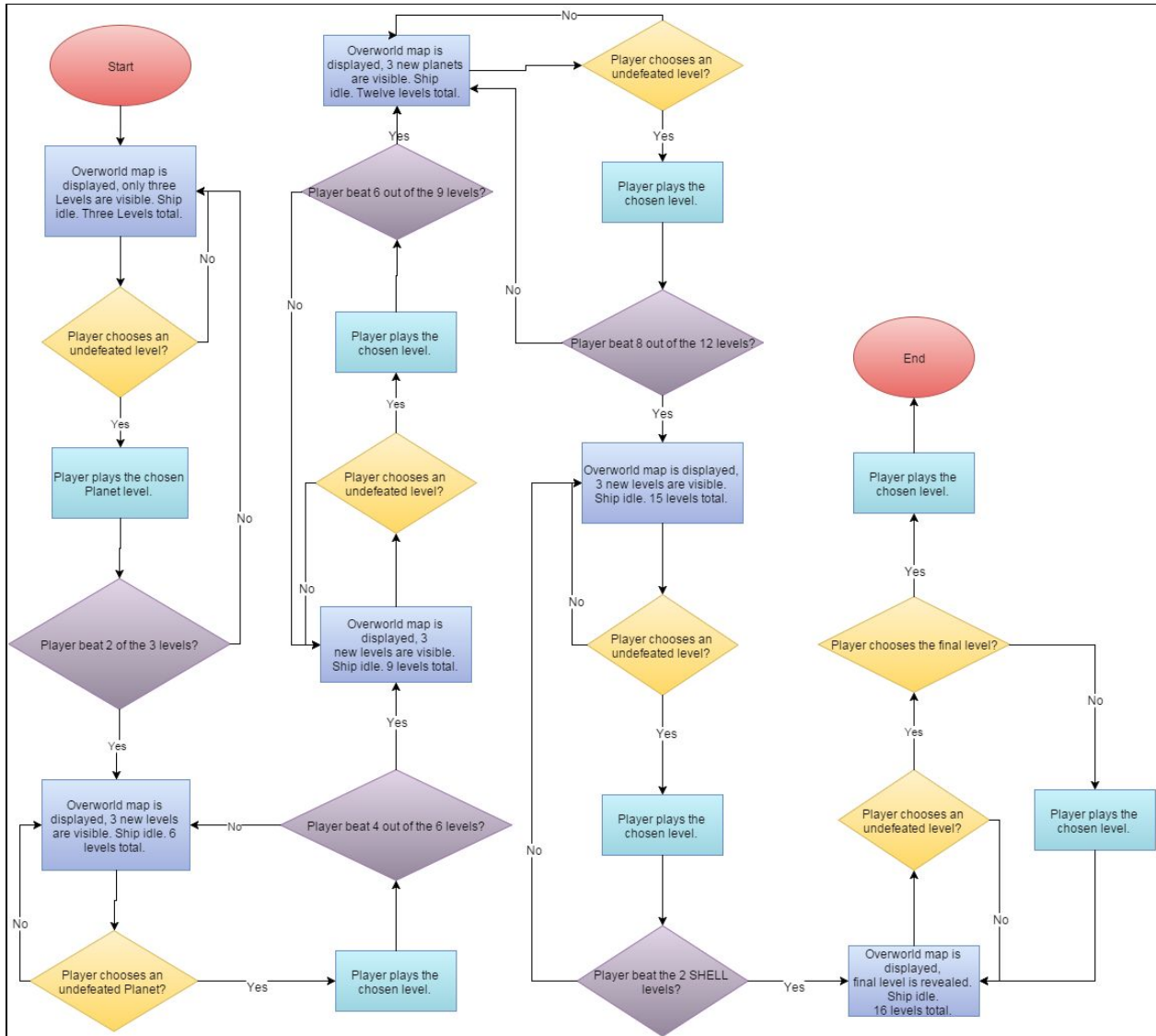
Surprise

New encounters await around each corner. Continually learn and discover new things throughout your journey. Players will receive a constant sense of freshness to the game.

Anticipation

New powers, challenges, and exciting gameplay will entice players to wonder what will come next.

Gameplay Flow



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The game is intended to take about 12 hours to complete. However, with New Game Plus, total playtime can comfortably reach 25 hours. Each level on average will take 30 minutes to complete, but players will spend time looking for collectables and experimenting with the player-created combo system, leading to increased average level playtime.

The game is divided into six phases, where different tiers of levels will be available to the player.

State 1:

In the first two to three hours of play, the player is only able to explore the first three 'beginner' levels. In these levels the player will only have a few forms to experiment with and most of the enemies can be defeated in many different ways.

State 2:

After having defeated two of the three beginner levels, the next three levels (intermediate) are made available on the starmap for exploration. These next three levels are expected to take two to three hours to complete. The player now has a few more options to create more interesting combos. Enemies begin to be resistant to certain playstyles, requiring the player to use specific attacking strategies.

State 3:

Once four of the total six levels are defeated, the next three levels show up on the starmap. These levels are also expected to take three to four hours to complete cumulatively. Most enemies at this point can counter the strategies the player likely used early in the game. The player must begin using at least four different forms per level in order to progress.

State 4:

When six of the total nine levels are completed, the three 'hard' levels are revealed on the player's map. These levels will take at least four hours to complete. By now every enemy type is challenging enough that unless a complex attack combination is used (utilizing multiple Protomorph forms) the player cannot progress.

State 5:

Once the player has cleared eight of the possible twelve levels, three 'expert' levels are revealed on the star map. These levels will take nearly an hour each to be completed. At this point the player has most of the forms and has mastered many different fighting styles and attack combos. Enemy difficulty scales exponentially here to match the skill increase in the player.

State 6:

After the two SHELL levels are cleared, the final stage is made available to the player. This is a long epic battle that will tax the player into using nearly every Protomorph form and attacking style in his arsenal. This level will take an hour to complete.

Gameplay Beats

The high-level progression of the narrative of Protomorph is as follows:

Beat 1: The Origin

- Captain Fix stumbles upon diabolical SHELL plans
- Plans are exposed to the public, sparing the Galaxy of corporate injustices
- SHELL murders Fix's family in retaliation
- Fix discovers Protomorph artifact during unsuccessful assault on SHELL outpost
- Transforming his ship for the first time, Fix is amazed by his new potential

Beat 2: Beat-down

- Fix learns that as is, he is not strong enough to defeat SHELL
- With the power of the Protomorph technology, he figures he stands a chance
- Goes artifact hunting
- In finding new Protomorph forms, Fix gains confidence despite not being strong enough to defeat SHELL yet
- Resolves to stop at nothing to become powerful enough to exert his revenge

Beat 3: Baby Steps...

- First run-in with SHELL since the first assault
- Is successful, learns whereabouts of SHELL decision-makers
- SHELL Agent Locke is introduced in this battle, escapes Fix to warn SHELL of his increased power
- Becomes more lustful for power seeing what he is becoming capable of

Beat 4: Pushing Forward

- SHELL and Locke pursue Fix with many more resources
- Much more challenging this time around
 - Fix overcomes, but just barely
 - Locke is the boss, pushing Fix's powers to their absolute limits- but escapes again
- Fix resolves that he must continue to grow more powerful

Beat 5: Not Yet, I'm Nearly There

- Feeling a renewed sense of urgency, Fix expresses more panicked and aggressive emotions

- Fix begins to fanatically obsess over finding more Protomorph artifacts
- Turns over the photo of his family on his dashboard
- Begins having power-fantasies of defeating Agent Locke

Beat 6: Release

- Fix intercepts a SHELL scout ship and mercilessly destroys him in a chase sequence through an asteroid field
- Fix is now entirely consumed by his desire for revenge, letting go of all inebriating obstacles
- Agent Locke dies in a final boss encounter, where Locke expresses fear and extends apologies to Fix for SHELL's actions
 - Fix is uninterested in Locke's resolutions- and shows no mercy

Beat 7: Vengeance

- The final conflict. Having collected all the artifacts, Fix finally confronts the SHELL mother base.
- Filled with rage, he destroys everybody in the base, the base, and his own ship in the explosive aftermath

Gameplay Phases

Phase 1: Sandbox

The player will be getting acclimated with the base battle system with minimal bells and whistles. The levels available are easy- enemies can be defeated by using most successfully executed attack combos. Since not many Protomorph forms are available to be used yet, the player is able to learn the basic ins and outs of form-switching in a simple context.

These first few levels act as a safe sandbox to let the player experiment techniques for future use. The state of gameplay will deliver a sense of discovery and an taste of expression to the player. Figuring out how to operate the ship, its mech forms, and which combinations yield fruitful effects is fun in the sense that the player is learning what he is capable of. The player will also learn the general cadence of combat, which will be critical in learning to experiment combos in the future. This phase incorporates the first and second Gameplay Beats: 'The Origin' and 'Beat-down'- as the player's motivations are demonstrated and the game's circumstances are defined.

Phase 2: Adaptation

At this point the player will have at least three, if not four Protomorph forms to switch in and out of. Not all of them are required at this point, however enemies and environments now require the player to fight in certain ways. Enemies now counter unsuccessfully executed combos consistently, and the player can no longer rely on the same combos they used in Phase 1.

In this phase the player adjusts his playstyle as a result of increasing challenges. More effort is spent reacting to different enemy types as opposed to figuring out new combinations to execute. This phase coincides with the third Gameplay Beat: 'Baby Steps...' since in this phase the player really begins getting a deep sense of how to play.

Phase 3: Challenge

Enemies now can also counter successfully executed combos if they happen to be strong against that style of attack. The player can no longer experiment different attack combos arbitrarily, they must now be created intelligently. If the player is fighting shielded enemies, combos now require starting off with 'shield-busting' attacks, for example.

In this phase, the player begins to discover the extent of his potential due to the stable of Protomorph forms he has collected thus far. The challenge is met with a strong sense of expression, since by now the player is familiar with enemy types and their weaknesses. This phase is associated with the fourth Gameplay Beat: 'Pushing Forward' as the player gains momentum in his journey to the end.

Phase 4: Arsenal

The player must now be consistently using a wide variety of Protomorph forms throughout each level, since enemies now exhibit complex attributes that will nullify previous weaknesses. This means the player must now discover even more nuanced attack combinations that can break through complex defenses. Challenge ramps up sharply to make sure the player does not overpower the enemies. For example, the player must utilize speedy initiative attacks in conjunction with powerful bludgeoning finishing moves in order to defeat enemies that combine elusive maneuvers and projectile armors. Additionally, the volume of enemies confronting the player at a time is also increased, forcing the player to be more precise and to act quicker. This phase coincides with the fifth Gameplay Beat: 'Not Yet, I'm Nearly There', because while the player has to this point accumulated many abilities, he still has an appetite for more.

Phase 5: Peak

Throughout the two levels in this phase the player will be tasked with sustaining a high-octane battle cadence over long periods of time. This is mainly done by having every enemy the player has encountered up to this point present in the level in high quantities. Due to the sheer volume of the enemies to be dealt with, the player is now challenged to come up with new combinations from their latest unlocked Protomorph forms to effectively deal with multiple enemies at once. The player is intended to be surprised by how powerful they are, and how able they were in figuring out new effective combos on the fly against the most pressing challenge yet. With the amount of enemies being faced, the player has the ideal opportunity to begin experimenting combos now that they have unlocked every Protomorph form in the game. The fun derived from expression and discovery are at an all time high. This phase incorporates the sixth Gameplay Beat: 'Release', since the game finally allows the player to exert all of his powers at once.

Phase 6: Climax

In the last level, in addition to facing waves of enemies as seen in Phase 5, the player is also tasked with defeating a dynamic boss that can switch forms much like he himself can. The player has now hopefully mastered the most effective attack combos and has a strong understanding of a wide variety of playstyles. This is essential, as the boss can change forms faster than the player, presenting an unprecedented challenge. Fun from combat is now less about discovery and expression and instead now lends itself entirely to leveraging challenge. This final phase begins and resolves the seventh Gameplay Beat: 'Vengeance'.

Game Difficulty & Progression

Protomorph has two difficulty modes: Normal and Hard. For an additional challenge, once the game is completed, the game can be played in New Game Plus mode.

The Normal difficulty level is intended to deliver a gameplay experience where players generally only fail when they don't pay attention to enemy fighting styles or if they simply do not understand the battle system. The average player in our target audience will not reach a "Game Over" state more than fifteen times throughout the game- as the core gameplay is still meant to be challenging.

The Hard difficulty level is designed for the most masochistic players in our target audience. While enemies will not have more health in this mode, they play much more skillfully and the player is punished more severely for not adapting their playstyle accordingly. We expect less than 15% of players to finish the game in Hard mode.

Across both difficulty modes, the difficulty level is fairly high. Our target audience plays games to master complex systems- and large, complex systems are most fun to use in a challenging context. If we give our players tons of options to take on the game and they were all equally and uniformly viable- the system would be cheap and not worth learning. Therefore, we design levels and enemies where most of the options the player has, when used uncreatively, yield unsuccessful outcomes. We believe that our target audience derives pleasure from learning meaningful information that helps them overcome challenges that would stump less clever players.

In New Game Plus, players have all their Protomorph forms and attack combinations available from the very start of the journey, however a few gameplay tweaks are made to increase the challenge. For one, there will be no health item pickups, the player will only heal between levels and once per level at the mid-level checkpoint. Furthermore, enemy spawn locations are changed and they all play more aggressively. And finally, bosses have additional attack types to present more unique and challenging encounters to the player.

Difficulty	Enemy Placement	Small Vial Rate	Hp Drop	Large Vial Rate	Hp Drop	Enemy HP Multiplier	Boss Attack Moves	EX Meter Refill Amount	Check Points
Normal	Regular	Often		Sometimes		x1.0	Regular	Fast	Regular
Hard	Dense	Sometimes		Rare		x1.5	Regular	Regular	Regular
NGP Normal	Regular	Rare		Super Rare		x2.0	Extra	Regular	1 per level
NGP Hard	Dense	Never		Never		x2.5	Extra	Slow	1 per level

Game Environment Overview

Terrain Type

The game world- the Kali Galaxy- is a star system composed of different planets, moons, asteroid belts, and space stations that the player can travel to. Each of these individual locations contains its own level. The map is partitioned to allow for a rational difficulty progression. Therefore, for instance, at the beginning of the game only the four easiest levels are made available for exploration.

Individual levels are persistent 2D environments. Platforms, bottomless pits, elemental hazards, and various different enemy types populate the levels. Specific levels will feature a particular theme of hazard. For example: a planet that exhibits heavy gravity will leverage wide pits to be fallen down and large falling objects to be dodged or destroyed.

Paths

Levels have defined progressions as seen in Metroidvania type games, but many paths are made available to the player. Because of this, levels will not feel linear. Players will have to backtrack to find newly unlocked pickups, fight respawning enemies, and defeat a boss on each level. If the level has a Protomorph form on it, when the boss is defeated the form's artifact is collected. Each level also has a Protomorph Badge hidden in a secret location.

Enemy Placement

Enemy placement and pathing is static. Each hazard will be strategically placed so as to properly pace the challenge that the player is intended to overcome. This means that a player will first be exposed to enemies and environmental hazards in isolation, so that they can later be fairly expected to overcome them in an integrated challenge. Locked paths are also static, meaning that key and switch locations will not change.

Every configuration of obstacles in these levels and their greater progression facilitates experimentation. Because of a wide variety of obstacles the player will have to test new attack combinations in order to overcome challenges. Therefore the player will constantly be learning new techniques- both successful and unsuccessful.

Level Type

Each map location is a 2D sidescrolling level. Players will be able to explore locations in both horizontal directions, clear platforms to reach higher or lower altitudes, and combat enemies

that respawn based on location. Some levels will be more open, featuring wide arenas for spectacle combat. Other levels will be tighter, featuring corridors and hallways that facilitate more calculated action and labyrinthian exploration. Visual styles vary wildly from level to level since each level corresponds to a different mythological theme. These themes will influence the style of enemy types and obstacles.

Levels

Protomorph will have Sixteen levels, partitioned into six groups of increasing difficulty. The five difficulty groups are Beginner, Intermediate, Hard, Expert, Master, and Final.

These levels are:

Difficulty	Level Name	Description	Enemy Faction Variety
Beginner	Jormungandr	A level with weaker enemies that perform area-of-effect poison attacks and pits filled with poison need to be avoided.	2
Beginner	Vedrfolnir	A level where more (stormy) environmental hazards endanger you rather than enemies.	2
Beginner	Mare	A spooky level with ghastly enemies and dark, ominous visuals.	2
Intermediate	Hermes	A level with very speedy enemies and large gaps to be cleared. Many moving platforms and shifting walls are also present.	2
Intermediate	Nyx	A moody level where light is sparse and enemies flank you by emerging from newly casted shadows.	2
Intermediate	Hydra	A level where enemies re-spawn very frequently, and some enemies can reanimate if not entirely destroyed. Waterfalls need to be scaled to get to the end.	2
Hard	Medusa	A level where enemies can petrify you. Many snake-like creatures are present.	2
Hard	Freyr & Freyja	A level where obstacles are consistently presented in pairs. Enemies collaborate to attack you together, and environmental hazard effects compound each other.	2

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Hard	Mimir	A level where many surfaces are dynamic, meaning the environment's form is constantly in flux. Enemies are fluid and react to your movements very intelligently.	2
Expert	Kraken	A level where the enemies try to grab you with long tentacle-like extremities. The environment expands and contracts, forcing the player to smartly navigate obstacles so as to not get caught.	2
Expert	Draugen	A level with many sonic threats. Attacks come in from long distances and pierce armor, so the player must use environmental obstacles to shield himself from danger.	2
Expert	Argus	A very mechanical level where enemies can shoot deadly lasers at the player whenever he is in visible range. The lasers destroy defensive structures so the player must utilize fast movements and attacks to attack before he is seen.	2
Master	Raijin	A level where the enemies can conduct lightning. A raging storm endangers the player from being out in the open for too long.	2
Master	SHELL Outpost	A level where the player begins his assault on SHELL. Many defensive structures and walls must be destroyed, and hordes of enemies charge at the player. The environment is wide, allowing for free movement.	3
Master	SHELL Army Compound	A level where a very wide assortment of enemy types are thrown at the player in tight spaces. Enemies are all very aggressive and try to force the player into corners.	3
Final	SHELL Mother Base	A boss-rush level where the player must defeat large versions of previously seen enemies, as well as a final boss that can also change form.	3

Player Experience

Emotional Style & Tone

Confidence, anticipation, and surprise. Throughout the game, the player will feel confident about their abilities, hold anticipation for new challenges & abilities, and consistently be surprised about finding new interesting combos to use.

While the game's narrative is stern and feeds a blood-lust fantasy, the gameplay feels playful and involved. Players will experience deep concentration in planning their attacks and combos, but the feeling and visual representation of those executed plans will be fast and pretty. Additionally, the execution of successful plans will feel intellectually satisfying, while failure to execute a strategy will elicit frustration and curiosity.

Player Mindset

The player should feel powerful with their forms, yet challenged by new enemies. The player will also be looking forward to test out their new abilities that they just received, while also anticipating the next form that will be available to them in the next area.

Players are intended to think deeply while planning which Forms and attacks to use when dealing with the game's challenges. This is meant to attract strategic game players- players that enjoy identifying weaknesses and exploiting them. Additionally, since combos have the potential to be wildly different, Protomorph also attracts button-smashing players- players that derive enjoyment from finding out the crazy effects of their even crazier button inputs.

Actions

Transforming

Player should be able to transform quickly with no delay time, allowing the player to feel confident in pulling off instant attacks.

Movement

Depending on the Protomorph form, the movements should feel natural according to the appearance of the form. For example, the Atlas form's movements should feel heavy and the Fenrir form's movements should feel lightweight. This allows the player to feel confident in any aspect of battle, from melee range with Atlas who has decreased knockback, to medium range with Fenrir who can dart in and out of battle.

Controls

The controls should be smooth and responsive, allowing the player to quickly transform between all of their available forms, without taking them out of the gameplay.

Combos

Each combo should be short enough to give the player immediate feedback on the value of it, while providing players a surprise to what effect that the combo has.

Encounters

New Locations

Unlocking new locations should give players a sense of increasing difficulty and anticipation of what to expect.

Each selectable star location on the starmap will have its own unique artwork, including components like planet sprites of different shape, sizes, and color. Additionally, upon hovering the cursor over a selectable level, the music will change to the level's theme, which should prime the player for the experience ahead. Information about each level will also be displayed, such as the level name, atmospheric details, inhabitant types, population, etc.

Boss Fights

Boss fights should be anticipated, as the theme of the level will influence the boss, but also surprise the player as to what the boss can do.

Each Boss is themed after the Protomorph form that will be unlocked by its defeat. This means that bosses will be using the unique attacks and movement abilities that you will eventually use yourself (excluding the SHELL levels and tutorial). This preemptively teaches the player how to use that form, while also presenting the player with a completely new challenge to solve and overcome.

New Protomorph Forms

Obtaining a new Protomorph form should make the player feel more powerful as well as excited for being able to try out new combos.

Encounter a new enemy

The player should feel surprised about encountering a new enemy and learning their attack patterns, and then feel confident once they have learned those patterns when facing that enemy again.

Presentation

Art Style

Ultimately, the visuals of Protomorph must strike a stark contrast from its brooding and bloodthirsty narrative. Models, animations, and particle effects must all be pulpy and high chroma- giving way for the player to feel like he is playing a viscerally satisfying arcade action game. Special attention should be paid to particle effects and attack animations, as they need to portray the nuanced effects of every attack in an immediately distinct way. Furthermore, the death and damage animations played on enemies must look gratifying- and must also be visually pleasing in a crowded scene.

The colours are bright and cheery for their attacks, to make them feel confident about their power, as if they are superior to their surrounding environment. The overall tone and presentation of the style will become more intense as each level progresses, providing anticipation for the boss. Each new area should also surprise the player with the new colours and overall feeling (such as ice, fire, etc).

Environment density should vary level to level. Some levels (according to their theme) should have very little visual noise and wide open spaces, while others should feel free to be compact with many moving parts.

A colorful lighting system to cast colored tints on nearby surfaces should also be implemented. Since each Protomorph form has its own thematic color palette, their attacks should cast accordingly colored particles that cast residual light on their surroundings.

Audio Style

During a level, the background music should make the player feel confident to explore around. Sound Effects of attacks should be short and give the player a sense of power and strength. Music of fighting a boss should feel engaging, epic, and with sudden changes fitting with the boss's attack styles.

When the player is in a Protomorph ruin, the background music should feel ancient, low in tone, and somewhat holy. Additionally, each level's mythological theme should naturally lend itself to appropriate sound effects. There will be no voice acting, as all dialogue is presented through text boxes.

Haptic Style

Vibration should correspond to the player attacking and getting hit. When the player attacks vibrations should give the feeling of power and weight behind each attack. When the player is hit vibrations should give the feeling of lethality and danger.

Furthermore, if the player toggles this option in the Settings, to drive the sense of transformation during player created attack combos, the transitions between Protomorph forms will also be accented by light haptic feedback. This would be a feather-light vibration, mimicking the hum of machinery switching gears.

Gameplay Experience Vision

Level: Jormungandr

Time: Level can be accessed from the very start of the game, five minutes from pressing 'Start'.

Duration: 15-25 min

Enemy types: Slime-blob Monsters, Smokey Cave Critters, Venomous Worms

Level overview:

The player finds himself outside of a cave with green fumes coming out of it. On-screen prompts show him how to move, attack, and change forms. Moving into the cave, the player must jump over toxic puddles, avoid poisonous gasses, and fight enemies. Destroying environmental barriers allows toxic puddles and gases to disperse, allowing the player to move further into the cave. At the end of the cave, the player must defeat the Jormungandr boss, who has toxic projectile attacks and close-up area-of-effect poison smashes.

Main Obstacles:

The key moments in this level are at the very beginning. The obstacles presented to the player need to be diverse so as to facilitate a need to use the different Protomorph forms at his disposal. Using the Atlas form will allow him to destroy environmental obstacles to disperse toxic puddles, and freezing enemies with the Fenrir form will allow the player to inhibit the enemies from poisoning him.

For example, when the player first encounters Slime-blob Monsters and Venomous Worms together, the one way to properly engage them is to execute a freezing attack on both of them. Otherwise, either of them can repeatedly poison the player. Additionally, using the Atlas form is viable as the player can close the gap of distance between the paired enemies so he can fight them one-by-one.

Many configurations of enemies and obstacle types will be employed to have the player thinking on his feet. Dripping toxic from the ceilings and toxic gases filling and escaping chasms all compound the required strategy needed to clear the level. Using Atlas' gravitational abilities and Fenrir's freezing abilities at the right times will be essential.

Player Experience:

In this level, the player experiences changing Protomorph forms to better handle obstacles for the the first time. This is a compelling period primarily because the player is given a space where pretty much any experimentation they perform will be successful. This instills confidence in the player early on to make use of multiple forms to overcome challenges.

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Additionally, the player also experiences a sense of wonder due to the aesthetics of the environment and how to interact with it in a meaningful way. Experiencing this wonder will whet the player's appetite for the rest of the game.

Furthermore, the player also experiences tactical combat for the first time. This feels exciting and new- since players will need to intelligently engage enemies in order to defeat them.